



Review of The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse

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however good his intentions, be aligned securely on the "side of the angels"—not to say, of those always questionable Olympian gods?

From these doubts, which many critics have well expressed and will continue to feel, I turn to a different question: whether the majestic vision of "cosmos and imperium" should not itself be "placed" within a hypothetically fuller reading of the *Aeneid*. For Vergil had played earlier with the notion of writing a panegyric epic poem to celebrate Augustus and the Battle of Actium—a consummation, to Augustus' mind and Maecenas', devoutly to be wished from one or another of these difficult poets; but of course, what Vergil ended up writing was not an *Actiad* but an *Aeneid*. And the difference is immeasurable—as is that between *Paradise Lost* and the projected panoramic epic of British history, the extended *Arthuriad*, that Milton had contemplated writing before the Cromwell years. I suggest that Vergil's *Actiad* does exist today, in the ekphrasis of Aeneas' shield. It is, as Vergil indicates, a powerful and effective *imago* of the cosmic-historic ideology whose background H. has so carefully developed, the same ideology brought out in Jupiter's speech to Venus in *Aeneid* 1 and in Anchises' presentation of the soul's nature and the pageant of Roman history in *Aeneid* 6. Yet it remains, precisely, an image. *Rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet*: the subject of that verb could have been Augustus, or the ordinary Roman reader, or even Vergil himself, composing his remarkable poem. We cannot ever, in this post-Lucretian world, recover certitude, even about the oldest, most inspirational visions of meaning and purpose. Our hearts, like Aeneas', may feel inspired and even reassured by images; still, we remain radically ignorant of whatever reality it is to which these images may ultimately point. The discrepancy between what we know and what we want to know remains appalling.

In the end, therefore, we must feel challenged by the great strength and success of H.'s book to turn once more from "cosmos and imperium" to the even vaster regions of Vergil's poem, as it embraces the achievements and failures, the allegiances and uncertainties, the struggles and the sadness of human life. The juxtaposition of all these levels is formidable. And so, for the critic, is the ever-expanding challenge of reinterpretation.

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The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse. By STEPHEN HINDS. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge—New York—New Rochelle—Melbourne—Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. xiv + 182. \$39.50.

This book, based on a Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation (although we are never quite told so), offers a careful examination of Ovid's two accounts of the rape of Persephone (*Fasti* 4. 417–620 and *Met.* 5. 341–661). The central focus follows from Heinze's quest for an explanation and definition of the distinction between the two narratives—a quest that has motivated much discussion in the intervening years. Hinds' treatment is both varied and comprehensive, observant of the

minute philological detail as of the larger literary implications: he is comfortable pursuing, on the one hand, issues dependent on the building blocks of Ovidian language and, on the other, those having to do with word-play, genre-blending, and metaphor.

There are two parts. The first contains two chapters devoted to study of short sections from the version in the *Metamorphoses* (5. 256–64: “The Heliconian Fount”; and 5. 385–91: “The Landscape of Enna”) and directed toward setting the scene for, and establishing the poetic preoccupations of, the account of the rape—“as a sort of *hors d'oeuvre* to the main study” (p. 4). The reader may question the appropriateness of this part of the menu, but its relevance does for the most part emerge from the close reading that H. directs toward demonstrating the *doctrina* of the poet, a reading that arouses our expectations for a narrative which will be complex, allusive, and metaphorical. This is especially true of the first chapter, in which he shows Ovid, in the account of the origin of Hippocrene, placing himself in a Hesiodic-Callimachean inspirational tradition. It is refreshing, in a critical age in which “historicism” and “source-criticism” are pejorative terms used to forbid us from taking account of our poets’ reading, to find fearlessness of such charges: “One’s reading of any piece of Latin poetry is enriched by consideration of its literary sources” (p. 6). And H. in these pages well demonstrates the complexity of Ovid’s reference to Aratus and Callimachus, as of self-reference between the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. Along the way (pp. 6–16) he suggests that the *Aratea* of Germanicus is similarly allusive, drawing not simply on the Greek original but also on Ovid’s renovation of Aratus. His proposing of metaphorical levels (for instance, that *Met.* 5. 264 *pedis ictibus* has a metrical as well as an equine connotation: pp. 16–18) will not convince everyone, but generally he finds good support for such suggestions.

Part 2 (“Ovid’s Two Persephones”) likewise falls neatly into two segments, each containing two connected chapters. The first of these segments treats the influence of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* first on *Fasti* 4, then on *Metamorphoses* 5, while the second synthesizes the earlier, more detailed observations and is aimed at resolving the question of the generic distinction between the two narratives. The chapters on the Homeric hymn are presented in a corrective mode, but their importance goes beyond that. On the basis of significant differences between the Homeric and Ovidian narratives, L. Malten had in 1910 posited a Hellenistic intermediary, perhaps Callimachus, and perhaps from the *Aetia*.¹ Much of the subsequent scholarly debate has had to do with competing identities for this intermediary (for instance, accounts of Nicander’s *Heteroionumena* show that it had coincidences with the account in the *Metamorphoses*), and the result of this debate has been an undervaluing of the formative importance of the Homeric hymn itself. The quest for lost Hellenistic versions that served as direct models for the Roman poets was once a popular enterprise: Catullus 64 was considered a “translation,” and the entire genre of Roman elegy was held to be rooted in a variety of Hellenistic elegy that has completely disappeared. The popularity of this procedure, involving an underestimation of the *doctrina* of Roman poetry, is blessedly on the wane, and H. in these pages helps to correct the picture: he argues that in terms of structure and in many

1. “Ein alexandrinisches Gedicht vom Raube der Kore,” *Hermes* 45 (1910): 506–53.

details Ovid himself reshaped the Homeric account. This is not to say that other, post-Homeric versions do not influence Ovid, merely that he may be referring both to such versions and to their source; and this, of course, is just what we would expect of him. More important, H. shows in these pages that the re-shaping of the story is plausible as an Ovidian development, that Ovid himself was quite capable of the originality that many critics would attribute to lost intermediaries. A cautionary note: even though H. for the most part convinces in these pages, it is not impossible that some of the details for which he claims direct Homeric influence in fact come from an intermediary; ultimately, there is no way of knowing as long as we lack those versions.

The penultimate chapter ("Elegy and Epic: A Traditional Approach") resurrects Heinze's notion that the style and tone of the two versions reflect the essence of the genres in which they appear, that in the *Fasti*—appropriately for elegy—we find "softer feelings, sorrowful lamentation and pity," while the version from the *Metamorphoses* is characterized by "strong, active emotions . . . sudden love and sudden anger" (p. 99, quoting Heinze). This insistence that the distinctions between the versions are motivated solely by differences in genre is somewhat against the current critical trend, as H. acknowledges (pp. 100–101). At first he sets out to give further support to Heinze's distinction, and here has a few additional arguments to present, but he admits finally that differences motivated by traditional generic expectations are not clear-cut.

This opens the way to the final chapter ("Elegy and Epic: A New Approach"). Here we find interesting observations on the crossing of generic boundaries and on Ovid's embedding of metaphors for generic preference, particularly in *Metamorphoses* 5. Ultimately, however, with whatever degree of cautiousness, and with modifications, he restates Heinze's thesis, that generic appearance is matched by generic intent. Here the ground becomes less steady. The claim that the *Fasti* is obsessed with its elegiac form and the strain produced by the imposition of grander material (p. 115), and that the sheer bulk of the *Metamorphoses* prevents the reader from ever losing sight of its being an epic poem, whatever boundaries are crossed—these do not seem to lead necessarily to a conclusion that generic integrity is maintained; rather, they suggest that the poet is playing with the reader's expectations—as many of Hinds' examples show very nicely.

There is also a problem of definition here. We are told (p. 119) that "elegy is the language of the *querimonia*, especially of the *querimonia* for the dead," so that *Fasti* 4. 481–86 is true to the genre of the poem because it is marked by Ceres' lament for Persephone. But this is hardly a definition of elegy that would suit Propertius or Ovid's own *Amores*, which for the most part share little more than a metrical system with the bulk of the *Fasti*. And if elegy is by the time of the *Fasti* little more than longer poems written in elegiac couplets, while epic is in essence still longer poems written in hexameters, then generic labeling does not get us very far. Moreover, selectivity can lead to a slanted conclusion. In *Metamorphoses* 5. 341–45 H. sees Ovid "epicizing" an elegiac context from the new Gallus. This may in itself be legitimate;² but what of the passage just below

2. Although some, particularly those disinclined to attach too much importance to the new Gallus, will find the repeated words and ideas (Gallus: *carmina* . . . / *quae possem domina dicere digna mea*; Ovid: *dicere possim* / *carmina digna dea*) insufficiently remarkable to support the large conclusions adduced.

(362–84), where Venus' admonition to Cupid recalls not only (as H. notes) Vergil's Dido (itself epic that has been generically subverted?), but also the poet's own dealings with the god in *Amores* 1. 1? It is, I suppose, partly a matter of perspective, of whether the generic cup is half-full or half-empty. Either genre is overriding and boundaries are crossed to exhibit *doctrina* or for some other reason; or the extensive boundary-crossing turns the work into something that can no longer be satisfactorily defined in formal terms—and it is the inability to categorize this latter animal that perhaps leads to a preference for the former.

But however one stands on this last issue, the book remains a stimulating piece of work, dense with many intelligent observations directed toward resolving an important question in Latin studies.

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J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work. By ROBERT ACKERMAN. Cambridge–New York–New Rochelle–Melbourne–Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. x + 348 + 11 ill.; frontispiece (portrait) in text. \$39.95.

Sir James G. Frazer was one of the handful of anthropologists whose works have spoken beyond the discipline to a very wide audience, not only of intellectuals, but of the general literate public. One thinks also of Margaret Mead, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Ruth Benedict, Franz Boas, and E. B. Tylor, who, in rather differing ways, were widely influential; but the list cannot be greatly lengthened. The most useful previous treatment of Frazer, S. E. Hyman's *The Tangled Bank*, in fact places him in the company of Darwin, Marx, and Freud—albeit as an imaginative writer rather as a social theorist. And yet the opening sentence of Ackerman's biography consists of the stark declarative statement: "Frazer is an embarrassment." An armchair anthropologist who "lacked the idea of culture as the matrix . . . that gives meaning to social behavior and belief, and thus had no qualms about comparing items of culture from the most disparate times and places," Frazer was someone whom no present anthropologist wants "for a professional ancestor" (p. 1). Not, one might think, a very auspicious beginning for a biography. Nevertheless, A. has provided us with a richly informative and extremely useful book—so comprehensively researched in the Frazer papers (and a variety of other manuscript sources) that any future biographer, if such there should be, might feel it a redundancy to have consulted them.

The tone sounded by the opening sentence is echoed elsewhere in the book, most notably in the discussion of the third edition of *The Golden Bough*. Describing one passage as "unintelligible" (p. 255) and another as an "amazing farrago of nonsense" (p. 254), A. argues (convincingly) that certain specific changes Frazer had introduced in fact destroyed "the theoretical coherence of the entire work" (p. 251)—although in a more general sense, as he remarks at a later point, Frazer "changed nothing because unfortunately he had learned nothing" (p. 307). But despite this strikingly uncelebratory approach to its subject, A.'s biography has many of the characteristics of a nineteenth-century